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MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF
AND HARD OF HEARING

MCDHH News

Commissioner's Message

Entering 2005, MCDHH is reaching the half-way mark for completing many complex projects. I hope that each of you will look back on 2004 and ahead to 2005 with as much sense of accomplishment and anticipation as I do.

MCDHH accomplishments reflect our commitment to accessible communication, advocacy, social services, education, and safe community living. And, all of these accomplishments are part of doing our work in ways that positively impact the quality of life for the Commonwealth's people who are deaf, Deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and DeafBlind. The MCDHH list of projects and advancements is long; here are just a few.

Our Memorandum of Understanding with the MA Department of Education was renewed for three more years, and in one related milestone, 157 interpreters working in k-12 school programs joined support groups in 5 regions, participated in workshops, and have begun to request skill assessments, all aimed at improving the quality of education provided to deaf and hard of children.

Collaboration with the Dept of Mental Health, provided our sister agency with technical assistance and training, advisory council input, and support for the search process that led to the hiring of bi-lingual service coordinators who will address the mental health needs of people we mutually serve.

We are wrapping-up the Elder Caregiver grant and related collaboration with the federal Agency on Aging, Elderly Affairs, New England Homes for the Deaf, and the Good Life Center. And, in a positive ripple effect, assistive equipment can be explored in the

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Deputy Commissioner Ford joins MCDHH



Patricia "Tricia" Ford was hired to become the new Deputy Commissioner of Programs & Policy at MCDHH on May 10th, 2004.

Tricia is a native New Englander who grew up in Hingham with a love of the ocean and the island of Martha's Vineyard. Her paternal grandparents were of Irish descent and her grandfather was one of the first ladder fire men in South Boston and an L-street brownie. (those folks who like to swim in January!) Tricia fell in love with American Sign Language in seventh grade while watching the Miss America contest with her parents. Miss Massachusetts contestant had a sister who was Deaf and she signed the song "People Who Need People" as her talent. Tricia immediately told her parents she wanted to learn sign and work with children. She has continued to be true to her dreams in seventh grade and has worked as a professional in the field of deafness since 1977, first volunteering at Deaf Incorporated. Tricia also worked with the Veterans Administration Outpatient Clinic with veterans who lost their hearing during the war. Her background also includes working in several school systems for the deaf, and as a state-wide staff development and trainer for the Bureau of Institutional Schools. All great experiences to bring to her new position.

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Commissioner's Message.....Continued from front page

Boston office Technology Demonstration Center.

Requests for Proposals (RFR) expanded our reach in developing and providing services. We've prepared, posted, and awarded contracts for CART Mentoring, Interpreter Mentoring, CDI Screening, and Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) Training. Meanwhile, we posted and continue to accept responses for SCPI raters.

We've just released the updated 4th edition of our most requested publication, the "Guide for People Who Become Deaf or Severely Hard of Hearing", authored by Karen Rockow, PhD.

The Interpreter Referral Information System (IRIS) is advancing towards internet hookup; selected to be funded among EOHHS Phase II IT projects.

MCDHH's Communication Policy is a comprehensive model, yet we still seek to improve. How we communicate was the focal point for a thought-provoking all-staff retreat held at U Mass Amherst on November 30th.

Our team was strengthened when we welcomed Tricia Ford as Deputy Commissioner for Programs & Policy, Mary Kate Loughran as Human Resources Liaison, Deb Lobsitz as CATTS Specialist, and Lisa Nolan in Referral.

Recovering from last year's budget crunch, our front desk phones went live again, and frontliner Shannon LeMarche is extra heroic for making the daily commute from a beautiful but far village on the Cape. Watch for our frontdesk to add Dlink for face to face service in Boston and Springfield.

Case Manager Isabel Lyndon announced her retirement, and following a warm sendoff, continues her dedication by serving on the committee interviewing to fill three department vacancies.

Communication Access Technology & Training Specialist (CATTS) Dianne Lucier Shearer won statewide performance recognition as a top ten Commonwealth employee; receiving the Manuel Carballo Award.

Springfield Office Manager Pam Korzec, Interpreter Cindy Murray, and CATTS Specialist Dianne Lucier Shearer won our votes as Pride in Performance winners.

The list goes on, and ultimately sends a clear message that as needs of the people we serve are continually evolving, our agency-wide resourcefulness and know-how evolves as well. I hope you will find this newsletter informative and useful, and will anticipate the year ahead as much as I do. We welcome your comments and suggestions as we leverage our work to deliver communication access, social services, education, and safe community living.

Heidi L. Reed

Heidi L. Reed, Commissioner

Tricia Ford Joins MCDHH.....Continued from front page

Tricia earned a MS in Rehabilitation Counseling from Boston University, and a BS in Communication Disorders from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She was Assistant Director of Development and Public Relations at The Learning Center for Deaf Children, in Framingham, MA, from 1999 to April 2004. She holds Guidance Counselor Certification from the Massachusetts Department of Education, and is licensed in Mental Health and Family Counseling. She is also a free-lance ASL interpreter with CT certification from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf.

As Deputy Commissioner for Programs and Policy, Tricia's responsibilities will include the administration and oversight of the direct services delivery component of MCDHH; CATTS, Case Management and Social Services, Interpreter and CART Services, DHILS contracts, and specific projects as designated. ♦

Dianne Lucier recognized by Governor Romney



Dianne Lucier holds the position of Communication Access Training Specialist for the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, working out of the Springfield regional office.

She continuously displays a strong commitment to her work and the people that she serves. Confronted with numerous complaints of inaccessible hospitals and police departments that were not observing the legal rights of the deaf and hard of hearing, Dianne launched a letter-writing campaign in which she introduced herself and the Commission's services. Her aggressive outreach campaign has led to a steady increase in the number of trainings provided by the Commission and also increased the awareness of public safety and health professionals to the communication barriers faced by the deaf and hard of hearing.

Dianne has worked in the field of deaf and hard of hearing advocacy for twelve years. Some of her professional accomplishments include director of a group home for deaf persons with multiple disabilities and she also served as program coordinator for the National Theater of the Deaf, where she developed, coordinated and presented workshops on numerous topics related to theater, sign language and the deaf community. Dianne is active in the Deaf Professionals Group of Western Massachusetts and also serves on the Advisory Boards for the Deaf Studies programs at Holyoke Community College, Mt. Wachusett Community College, and Stavros Independent Living Center.

Dianne and her husband Trevor recently returned from Hawaii, where they were married on October 16, 2004. She has taken her husband's name and will be known as Dianne Shearer from now on. Congratulations from all of us on both her outstanding work and her marriage!

Lieutenant Governor Kerry Healey presented the award to Dianne on Governor Romney's behalf. ♦

Popular Publication Updated, Available on Demand

Several years ago, MCDHH contracted with Karen Rockow, Ph.D, to write a book which would serve as an instruction manual of sorts for adults facing Deafness or severe hearing loss. This book, "A Guide for People Who Become Deaf or Severely Hard of Hearing", is now in its fourth edition and has become the single most popular publication in the MCDHH Repertoire, even outclassing our Statewide Resource Directory (which, incidentally, is slated for a January 2005 release date).

Each reprint has featured extensive, updated contact information, including agency and organization names and addresses, new telephone numbers, e-mails and website URL's.

Most recently, under the Administration on Aging grant mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, MCDHH was able to secure funding allowing us to print 30,000 of these books for distribution among the estimated 500,000 citizens of Massachusetts living with hearing loss. This most recent edition was completely revised in June of 2004.

Initial distribution efforts exceeded expectations as MCDHH staff distributed approximately 5,000 books at the Massachusetts Councils on Aging annual conference in Burlington, Massachusetts; since then, distribution has continued at health fairs, educational events, presentations and in response to individuals requesting copies.

There is no charge for this publication, however, MCDHH cannot pay to ship more than several copies at a time due to the high shipping cost. If you would like to receive two or three boxes—there are 75 books in a carton—for distribution to your staff or constituency, please e-mail Debra.Lobsitz@state.ma.us to make arrangements to pick them up at our Boston, Plymouth, Worcester, Springfield or Pittsfield locations.

The "Guide" is also available for download as a PDF document from our website: www.mass.gov/mcdhh. We are currently working to produce a screen-reader compatible format for posting on our website so that our constituents who are blind or have low vision have an accessible document at their disposal, as well. ♦

Community Advocacy Engenders Change

Dr. Alan Bernstein, a professor at Framingham State College, called MCDHH for assistance regarding the accessibility mandates covering open town meetings in his home community of Leominster.

Dr. Bernstein, who attends public hearings conducted by city entities such as the Conservation Commission, the Zoning Board of Appeals, the License Commission and the Planning Board, was unable to benefit from them due to the lack of accessibility inherent in the structure, locations, and procedural management of the meetings themselves.

After MCDHH supplied Dr. Bernstein with the necessary information, which included demographic and technical information as well as an overview of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act Title II - which specifically addresses the accessibility obligations of state and local government entities - Dr. Bernstein contacted Leominster Mayor Dean Mazzerella. The Mayor then invited Dr. Bernstein for a face-to-face meeting to discuss his concerns. The following action steps were arrived at:

- A statement was formulated which addressed both the accessibility concerns and the solutions that were necessary to alleviate them
- A compliance deadline of 60 days from the formulation date was arrived at by both parties
- Mayor Mazzerella agreed to establish a citywide Disability Access Committee in Leominster

The suggested remedies included the installation of appropriate FM systems (wireless devices that utilize radio waves to bridge the gap between the speaker's voice and the listener's ears) in rooms where public meetings will be held, as well as the provision of a fixed sound system to increase the signal to noise ratio in a large auditorium where ambient background noise often overpowers the voices of panelists.

As of October of 2004, ALDs have been purchased and are in the process of being installed, and the Mayor is working to establish the Disability Access Committee. – Our thanks to go Dr. Bernstein for sharing this story; and we highly commend Mayor Mazzerella for his readiness to address the needs of citizens with hearing loss and include them in the daily workings of city government. ♦

Department of Mental Health hires Deaf Case Managers

The Massachusetts Department of Mental Health is pleased to welcome three new staff members. They are: Justine Barros, Ruben Leon and Catherine Mylotte.

These three individuals will provide case management services to DMH clients who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Each of them has extensive experience in mental health services, and they are also very involved in the Deaf community. They are Deaf themselves and fluent users of American Sign Language.

Ms. Mylotte will provide services in the MetroBoston Area; Mr. Leon will provide services in the Metro Suburban and Southeast Area and Ms. Barros will cover the Northeast Area and assist in other Areas as needed.

For more information, please contact **Lucille Traina** at DMH's Boston office at (617) 626-8073 Voice. ♦

Do you have news that directly impacts Deaf, hard of hearing, late deafened or DeafBlind individuals living in Massachusetts? We can help you spread the word!

For **website** "news" submissions or linking requests, contact Jonathan O'Dell at Jonathan.O'Dell@state.ma.us anytime for immediate posting.

For inclusion in this bi-annual **newsletter**, please e-mail submissions to Jonathan O'Dell (e-mail address given above) for consideration no later than **June 3rd, 2005**.

Elder Caregiver Grant Concluded Successfully

The Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs wrapped up a three-year federally funded grant to demonstrate strategies for caregiver training and adult social daycare services designed to assist deaf and hard of hearing elders. This time-limited project served as a model of procedures for service providers to reach elderly people who are hard of hearing or deaf, and their caregivers, and connect each with information, assistance, and resources for living safely and independently.

In addition to presenting a national model for how to provide services for elders whose culture places them at an economic or social disadvantage, the project demonstrated ways to improve the well-being of elderly people:

- Provide community-based caregiver training for deaf, late-deafened and hard of hearing elders
- Reduce the isolation or segregation that deaf, late-deafened and hard of hearing elders and their caregivers may experience.
- Give deaf, late-deafened and hard of hearing elders the ability to participate in their care decisions.
- Reduce the stress and associated adverse health risks to caregivers of deaf, late-deafened and hard of hearing elders.

Key collaborators in this Project were the New England Homes for the Deaf, Inc., (NEHD) in Danvers, MA, and the Good Life Center, (GLC) in Springfield, MA. MCDHH contracted with NEHD to operate a social daycare program for elderly deaf persons and a Demonstration Caregiver Resource Center for Deaf, Late-Deafened, and Hard of Hearing Elders in the Greater Boston region. NEHD and MCDHH Communication Access Training and Technology Services worked with NEHD to design the curriculum for training caregivers.

In Western, MA, MCDHH contracted with the Springfield Department of Elder Affairs/ Good Life Center, to operate a second demonstration Caregiver Resource Center. The Good Life Center continues to offer a range of supports including communication classes, social and craft groups, and informational lunches. Elderly persons and their caregivers are also able to seek assistance through a social worker on staff at the Springfield office of MCDHH, as well as specialists available through Deaf and Hard of Hearing Independent Living Services at Stavros.

MCDHH remains very committed to collaborative efforts addressing communication access and other needs of elderly people who are deaf and hard of hearing. More information about caring for elderly people who are deaf and hard of hearing can be obtained by visiting the EOEA and MCDHH websites at www.mass.gov. ♦

MCDHH Welcomes New Human Resources Liaison

On Tuesday, October 5th, MCDHH welcomed our new Human Resources Liaison, Mary Kate Loughran.

Ms. Loughran holds a BA degree from Stonehill College, and comes to MCDHH from the South Shore Mental Health Center with a broad range of applicable experience and capabilities. Amongst other positions, she has been active as a Recruiter; Human Resources Assistant; Residential House Manager and Residential Case Supervisor. She is currently involved with DBCAN (Deaf Blind Community Access Network) as a Provider, and has been learning American Sign Language.

Among other responsibilities, Ms. Loughran is the person to contact in regards to posted employment opportunities at MCDHH. ♦



"I need a hearing aid, but how can I possibly afford one?"

Do you or does someone you know require hearing aids? Can you afford them? Are you aware of several programs that may assist you in purchasing a hearing aid? Do you know that there is presently a "Hearing Aid Bill" Committee that is working on a bill to have **ALL** health insurance agencies in Massachusetts provides sufficient coverage for hearing aid purchases? Here is a quick look at your options for affording the hearing aid you need.

One of your options for purchase of a hearing aid is through **The Assistive Technology Fund at MCDHH** which serves as a resource of 'last resort' to deaf and hard of hearing individuals in Massachusetts who are unable to obtain necessary communication related equipment and services from other sources. This fund is set up to cover a broad spectrum of communication tools: fm systems, signaling devices, sign language instruction, as well as assistance in purchasing hearing aids. MCDHH funds are limited and are distributed on a first come-first serve basis, but our hope is by showing a growing need, that we may be able to obtain further funds. Please contact Mary Macone via e-mail at Mary.Macone@state.ma.us, or call her at 617. 740.1653 Voice or 617.740.1753 TTY for an application.

Financial assistance for hearings aids is also available under federal **Title VII Part B** funding, which is made available to all of the Independent Living Centers in Massachusetts. To receive financial assistance through Title VII Part B certain eligibility guidelines must be followed. For a more comprehensive list of requirements, contact our list of our Independent Living Programs that serve deaf, hard of hearing, and late deafened individuals; a listing is available at www.mass.gov/mcdhh.

In addition, MCDHH is working on an agreement with Northeastern University to provide **refurbished hearing aids** to those eligible. This program requires a recent audiogram, which can also be provided by NU. MCDHH receives donated hearing aids, which are then refurbished at no cost to the consumer. The hearing aid supply is varied, a consumer would need to be matched with hearing aid(s) that could benefit their specific loss. If you are interested in being considered for this program, please contact Mary Macone at the e-mail address and phone numbers given above.

The **Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission** has just begun a new program called the **Massachusetts Assistive Technology Loan Program (MATLP)**, which will be operated by Easter Seals Massachusetts in conjunction with banking partner Sovereign Bank. This program provides an exciting new opportunity for qualified individuals with disabilities to buy the assistive technology they need with low interest loans. AT is defined as any device that enhances or expands a person's ability to live more independently, such as adapted computer equipment, walkers, **hearing aids**, scooters or wheelchairs, talking alarms, memory devices, vehicle modifications, augmentative communication devices and many more.

The program offers assistance in applying for loans through 20 access sites across the state.

For more information, call the program toll free at Easter Seals Massachusetts: 1. 800.244. 2756 Voice. Ask for Jason Luciano, Program Director , at extension 431; or Kristina Koles, Program Coordinator; at extension 428. The program's e-mail address is info@massatloan.org. **TTY users please call 1 800 564 9700.**

If you are interested in working on the **Hearing Aid Bill Committee**, or you would like to support the bill and require further information, please contact chairperson Paul Gambina at 508-947-5402 V/TTY, or e-mail him at pgambina@deafinonline.org. ♦

Quality Control is Top Priority at MCDHH's Department of Interpreter/CART Services

MCDHH's Interpreter/CART Services consists of two components: Interpreter/CART Referral services, where requests for interpreters and CART providers are received and filled; and Staff Interpreter Services, responsible for provision of internal and community interpreters as well as for interpreter screenings.

We adhere to strict standards of quality control in every operational aspect of both components. Our statewide interpreter screenings - which are designed to provide a high minimum competency standard for interpreters seeking to join our referral rolls - assure that only sufficiently qualified interpreters (those with national certification and/or who have passed the MCDHH screening) are used to fill the approximately 25 – 35, 000 requests we receive each year. For CART providers – CART stands for "Communication Access Real-time Translation", a verbatim text translation of spoken English used by persons who cannot hear but do not know sign language – we require national credentials before they are considered eligible to be on our referral list.

Our Intake and Referral Specialists are required to have extensive knowledge and training on the topics of hearing loss, communication methodologies and cultural/linguistic issues so that they will most appropriately match the consumer's communication needs for a particular situation with an available interpreter's (or CART provider's) skill and area of experience. Many of the I&R Specialists are current students or graduates of Interpreter Training Programs, assuring a high degree of familiarity with communication-related issues; this is further expanded by on-the-job training provided by MCDHH.

Staff interpreters, all of whom hold national certifications, are based at each of MCDHH's regional locations: Boston, Plymouth, Worcester, Springfield and Pittsfield. MCDHH also has CDIs - Certified Interpreters for the Deaf – on our staff. These are Deaf individuals who have been trained as interpreters to work with hearing interpreters in situations when the Deaf consumer does not use "formal" ASL. A CDI will bridge the gap between the hearing interpreter, who is skilled in ASL, and the visual-gestural signs employed by the consumer/client.

The role of Staff Interpreters is two-fold: first, they must provide communication access to MCDHH's numerous Deaf staff members as a form of reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act; secondly, they also work as "community interpreters" by filling unmet requests for which freelance providers may not be available. When a staff interpreter covers an event, MCDHH is reimbursed at the applicable rate by the requesting entity; this money is then used to pay for provision of interpreters in situations where there is no clear-cut legal mandate for any entity to provide communication access, such as community-based AA meetings. Staff interpreters also provide mentoring to student and practicing interpreters in preparation for the MCDHH screening process.

MCDHH currently provides specialized screenings for Oral Translators, ASL/English Interpreters and Signed English to English Translators. We are also in the process of developing a screening for CDIs and for interpreters for Deaf-Blind consumers. MCDHH would also like to develop a screening for CART providers in order to expand this resource as well. Finally, we are working to expand our internet referral system to make it possible for anyone, anywhere to make - and check the status of - requests for interpreters and CART providers within Massachusetts online. ♦

MCDHH Website migration to be implemented soon

Starting in early February, the process of bringing the MCDHH website in line with the mass.gov portal will begin. It is expected to take at least two months; during that time, MCDHH staff will be meeting weekly with representatives from ITD to streamline the process and make sure that the information and functionality our constituency has come to rely on from our online presence is integrated into the architecture of our "new" website.

The ultimate goal is to present a single, streamlined interface for every consumer, business or professional entity who wishes to obtain information on, request services from, or do business with, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

We are excited about this project and look forward to successful completion. ♦

MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

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MCDHH Technology Demonstration Center

As part of the Elder Caregiver Grant from the Administration on Aging described elsewhere in this newsletter, a Resource and Demonstration Center was to be set up in each of the two grant locations.

While staffing and other issues prevented this from becoming a reality; MCDHH saw the need for such a community resource and was able to provide a suitable location for the display of the equipment purchased under the grant for demonstration purposes.

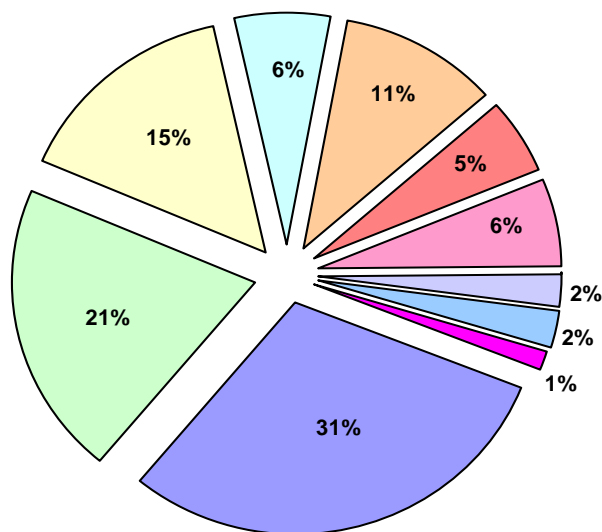
This Technology Demonstration Center is located in MCDHH's main office at 150 Mount Vernon Street in Dorchester; while it is open during business hours, building security regulations do require us to ask that appointments be made. If you are interested in individual consultation, or would like to arrange a tour, please e-mail Debra Lobsitz at Debra.Lobsitz@state.ma.us to arrange a mutually agreeable date and time.

The Center features a selection of amplified telephones, TTY's, environmental alerts, fire alarms and listening devices for personal as well as group and Television use. All of the equipment can be examined and tried out on site. The purpose of the Center is to provide an environment free of sales pressure where knowledgeable staff can provide helpful information to anyone who needs it.

Much of this technology is particularly applicable to homes in which elderly Deaf or hard of hearing people may live, as it enhances an individual's ability to remain independent in their own home and to be aware of important and potentially life-saving environmental alarms and alerts. ♦

Snapshot: MCDHH FY '05

MCDHH oversees a total of \$6,388,753 in state and federal funds. These dollars support Social Services, Communication Access, Education, and Substance Abuse Services



- Interpreter/CART Services
- DHILS - Deaf and Hard of Hearing Independent Living Services
- Case Management
- CATTS - Communication Access, Training, and Technology Services
- Administrative Expenses
- Interpreter Revenue
- Tech Act Grant - MATP
- DPH Interagency Service Agreement for Substance Abuse Services
- Department of Education Memorandum of Understanding
- Elder Affairs, Caregiver Grant